

# Planning Update 1

## *Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge*

### GREETINGS!

This is the first in a series of updates from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) designed to keep you informed and to get you involved in planning issues at the Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge).

The Ash Meadows Refuge, located in the Amargosa Valley northwest of Pahrump, was established in 1984. The primary purpose of the Refuge is to provide for the protection and recovery of endangered fish and plants. The most striking feature of the Refuge is the more than 30 spring-fed pools and streams that contrast sharply with the arid desert that surrounds them. Many of these isolated aquatic ecosystems support fish with highly restricted distributions, including the Devil's Hole pupfish which may have the most restricted habitat of any vertebrate on our planet.



**Ash Meadows Speckled Dace**

*Rhinichthys osculus nevadensis*

Fish are not the only aquatic species that have adapted to specialized habitats at Ash Meadows. Numerous freshwater snails and insects are also restricted to the aquatic ecosystems within the refuge. Many plants have also adapted to the special conditions of both wetlands and uplands of the Ash Meadows Refuge. In fact, at least 24 plants and animals that occur here are found nowhere else in the world.

Species that are restricted to a particular area are known as "endemics." This concentration of unique animals and plants distinguishes the Ash Meadows Refuge as having the greatest concentration of endemic species in the United States, and the second greatest concentration in all of North America. Twelve of these species are listed under the Endangered Species Act (see box below).

### *Endemic Ash Meadows Animals & Plants Listed under the Federal Endangered Species Act*

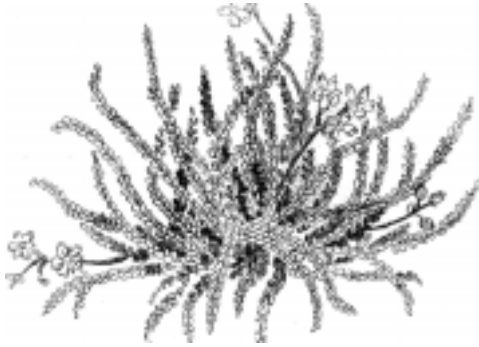
<i>Fish</i>	<i>Status</i>
Ash Meadows speckled dace	E
Warm Springs pupfish	E
Ash Meadows Amargosa pupfish	E
Devil's Hole pupfish	E
<i>Insects</i>	
Ash Meadows Naucorid	T
<i>Plants</i>	
Amargosa niterwort	E
Ash Meadows milk-vetch	T
Spring-loving centaury	T
Ash Meadows sunray	T
Ash Meadows gumplant	T
Ash Meadows ivesia	T
Ash Meadows blazing-star	T

E = Endangered (in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range)

T = Threatened (likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future)

### Ash Meadows ivesia

*Ivesia eremica*



Because of this tremendous biological diversity, the Ash Meadows Refuge was established in 1984 with the help of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). In 1986, Ash Meadow was among the first United States sites to be recognized as a Wetland of International Importance by the Ramsar Convention.

### HELP US PLAN FOR THE FUTURE PROTECTION OF THE REFUGE

This update describes actions proposed by the Service to ensure the Refuge remains protected and continues to promote the recovery of its unique fauna and flora. It also briefly describes the planning steps that are required to ensure this protection and explains how you can get involved in the Refuge planning. A schedule of the key planning steps and anticipated completion dates is included on the outside.

### WHERE WE'VE BEEN

On August 12, 1998, the Service published in the Federal Register a notice of their application to withdraw 5,360 acres of Federal minerals from mining and 9,460 acres of public lands within the refuge boundary from surface entry and mining for 20 years (see map on page 3). This notice temporarily closed these lands for two years from settlement, sale, location, and entry under the general land laws, including the mining laws, subject to valid and existing rights. **This does not affect private lands or minerals within the refuge boundary.** Public notices of this application were also published in local newspapers and comments from the public on this action were solicited. The 90-day public comment period closed on November 10, 1998.

### WHERE WE ARE

The closing of the comment period did not end your opportunities to comment on the withdrawal application. Your participation is an integral part of the planning process. The next step is a chance for you to help us identify issues and concerns regarding our proposal and for us to answer your questions on a one-to-one basis. We would like to meet with you and hear your concerns, so we have scheduled three public open houses for February 17th and 18th, 1999.

### OPEN HOUSE SCHEDULE

Date: Wednesday, February 17, 1999

Time: 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Place: Las Vegas Field Office, Bureau of Land Management, 4765 Vegas Drive, Las Vegas.

Date: Thursday, February 18, 1999

Time: 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

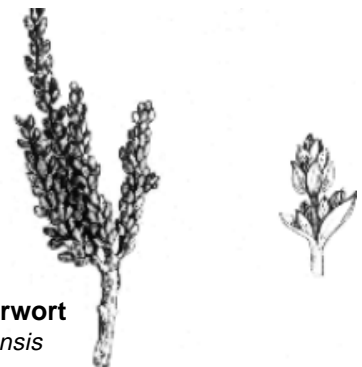
Place: Bob Ruud Community Center  
150 E. Basin Road at Highway 160,  
Pahrump.

Date: Thursday, February 18, 1999

Time: 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Place: Amargosa Valley Community Center,  
821 East Farm Road, Amargosa  
Valley.

The purpose of these meetings is to gather your ideas and comments and to answer questions about the refuge and the proposed withdrawals. Following a brief orientation, participants will be able to meet with key refuge management, planning, and environmental compliance staff. Your comments will be noted so that they can be addressed in future planning documents.



Ash Meadows niterwort

*Nitrophila mohavensis*

***Note to PDF viewers:*** An electronic copy of this map is not yet available. Please let us know if you would like to receive a paper copy

## PLEASE COMMENT

If you have questions or concerns on the withdrawal petition, you can bring them to the open house, call one of the people listed on page 5, or send us a letter or an e-mail message.

**Please address mail to:** Charles J. Houghten, Chief, Division of Refuge Planning, 911 NE 11th Avenue, Portland, OR 97232-4181. **Send e-mail to:** [r1planning\\_guest@fws.gov](mailto:r1planning_guest@fws.gov) (with "Ash Meadows" typed in the subject line). **The comment period closes March 12, 1999.** If you would like to receive future planning updates, as well as notices of planning activities, please contact us with your request to be added to our mailing list.

If you have Internet access, you can also request to be added to our mailing list, or obtain more information on planning activities and schedules for the Ash Meadows Refuge on the Service's Refuge Planning website at:

<http://www.r1.fws.gov/planning/plnhome.html/>

## WHAT COMES AFTER THE OPEN HOUSE?

A schedule of the key planning steps is included on the outside of this update. Based on issues and concerns raised at the public meetings and in letters, messages, or personal conversations, we will develop alternative proposals for the proposed action. These alternatives will be presented and their effects analyzed in several planning documents.



**Spring-loving centaury**  
*Centaurium namophilum*



**Ash Meadows sunray**  
*Enceliopsis nudicaulis* var. *corrugata*

No decision has been made on the type of planning document to be prepared, but the possibilities include either an environmental assessment or impact statement. Either will assess the potential positive and negative effects each alternative will have on wildlife, habitats, and local communities. You will have the opportunity to review and comment on the draft and final versions of the environmental document. We will announce the availability of these documents in future planning updates.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON OUR WITHDRAWAL PROPOSAL

When the Ash Meadows Refuge was established, it included about 12,000 acres acquired from TNC, 2,700 acres to be withdrawn from the public domain, and 6,600 acres to be managed cooperatively with the BLM. An additional 1,550 acres of private land were identified for eventual acquisition on a willing seller basis. Several previous withdrawal applications filed by the Service were cancelled.

The Service and the BLM now recognize a need to provide better habitat protection, improved management on public lands within the Refuge and, as importantly, to eliminate duplicate costs of two agencies managing the same lands. Therefore, transfer of all BLM lands within the Refuge to the jurisdiction of the Service is proposed (see map on page 3). These 9,460 acres of public land would also be withdrawn from settlement, sale, location, or entry under general land laws, including mining laws, but not the mineral leasing laws.

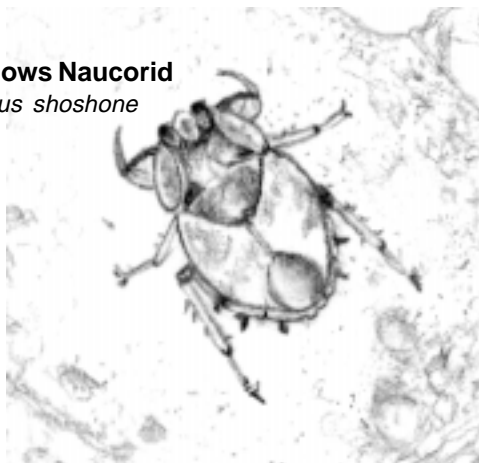
The Service also proposes to withdraw another 5,360 acres of public land within the refuge with reserved Federal minerals (see map on page 3) from location and entry under the mining laws, but not mineral leasing laws. The purpose of these proposed withdrawals is to protect seeps, springs, and habitats for the 24 plants and animals that are unique to the Ash Meadows ecosystem. The Service believes that settlement, sale, location, entry, and other mining activities would disturb, degrade, or destroy critical habitat for these species within the Refuge.

By law, these withdrawals are limited to 20 years, although this period may be extended after a review toward the end of the withdrawal period. **All withdrawals are subject to valid existing rights and no private lands or minerals are affected by these withdrawals.** The withdrawals would also not affect current compatible wildlife-dependent uses on the refuge including wildlife observation and photography, fishing and hunting, and environmental education and interpretation. No changes in current levels of public access on the Refuge are expected as a result of the proposed action.

### INTO THE NEXT CENTURY

A bipartisan coalition in the U.S. Congress joined with a diverse group of non-governmental organizations, state fish and wildlife agencies, and the Interior Department to craft the Refuge Improvement Act of 1997 (Act). The Act, signed into law on October 9, 1997, established much needed organic legislation to provide guidance for management and public use of the National Wildlife Refuge System. The Act also mandated

**Ash Meadows Naucorid**  
*Pelecorus shoshone*



that each National Wildlife Refuge develop a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) by the year 2012.

Although the objective of the public open houses is to gather comments on the proposed land and mineral withdrawal, other information provided to the Service during the withdrawal planning process will help to identify issues to be considered during the development of a CCP for the Ash Meadows Refuge. The planning process for the CCP will have many other opportunities for public involvement, but we encourage you to provide your ideas and concerns about the future of the Ash Meadows Refuge now. Your input will be recorded and given full consideration as we develop a vision for the Refuge in the next century.

### WHO TO CONTACT

#### Information on the Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge:

Eric Hopson, Refuge Manager  
Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge  
P.O. Box 115  
Amargosa Valley, Nevada 89020  
(775) 372-5435  
FAX (775) 372-5436

#### Information on Refuge Planning and Compliance:

Charles Houghten, Chief  
Division of Refuge Planning (ARW-RPL)  
911 NE 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Portland, OR 97232-4181  
(503) 231-2231 or (800) 662-8933  
FAX (503) 231-6161  
e-mail: [r1planning\\_guest@fws.gov](mailto:r1planning_guest@fws.gov)  
(Type "Ash Meadows" in the subject line)

**Visit the Fish & Wildlife Service Region 1  
Division of Refuge Planning website!**

<http://www.r1.fws.gov/planning/plnhome.html/>

*All illustrations by E. Tobin*

# ASH MEADOWS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE LAND AND MINERAL WITHDRAWAL

## TENTATIVE PLANNING SCHEDULE

Planning Step	Target Date
Planning Update #1 Issued	January 99
Public Open Houses (see inside)	February 17-18, 1999
Comment Period Closes	March 12, 1999
Draft Environmental Document Released	August 1999
Draft Environmental Document Comment Period Ends	October 1999
Final Environmental Document Released	February 2000
Record of Decision Document	March 2000

Please note that unforeseen circumstances could cause schedule changes.  
We will keep you posted of major changes.



**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**  
Fish and Wildlife Service  
Division of Refuge Planning (ARW-RPL)  
911 NE 11th Avenue  
Portland, Oregon 97232

*Address correction requested*